What is claimed is:

5   1. A method of enabling fee based access to one or more software applications,
comprising:

establishing a user account with a billing site which responds to input user
information and correspondingly debits the user account;

obtaining an application package for use on a client computer, the application package

10   including a metering monitor, a login tool, one or more client applications, and an application
library having metering means for developing information relating to usage of said client
applications;

using said login tool to establish communication with said user account at said billing
site;

15   using said metering means to obtain and communicate to said metering monitor usage
information relating to usage of said client applications on said client computer;

using said metering monitor to communicate said usage information to said user
account at said billing site; and

using the usage information to debit said user account.

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2. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein said user obtains said application package
from a software proprietor.

3. A method as recited in claim 2 wherein said application package is contained on a

25   data storage medium included in the group consisting of magnetic storage tapes, magnetic
storage disks, optical data storage disks, optical data storage disks, and electronic data storage
cards.

4. A method as recited in claim 2 wherein said user obtains said application package

30   by downloading it from a software proprietor's website.

5. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein said application package further includes a
configuration file, and wherein on startup of a client application, said login tool is used to
update said configuration file and identify the user to the billing site.

6. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein on login said billing site communicates or withholds authorization to run said client application based upon the state of the user's account.

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7. A system for providing fee based access to one or more software applications and for remotely monitoring use thereof, comprising:

    means forming a billing site having

        a database for storing user account information,

        communication means for receiving application usage data, and

        processing means for processing the usage data, attributing a cost to said usage data, and debiting said cost to a corresponding user account in said database;

        a client computer communicatively associated with said billing site; and

    an application package installed on said client computer, said application package including a metering monitor, a login tool, one or more client applications, and an application library having metering means for developing information relating to usage of said client applications;

        wherein said login tool is used to establish communication with a user account at said billing site, said metering means is used to obtain and communicate usage information relating to usage of said client applications to said metering monitor, and said metering monitor is used to communicate said usage information to said user account.

8. A system as recited in claim 7 wherein said application package further includes a configuration file, and wherein on startup of a client application, said login tool is used to update said configuration file and identify the user to the billing site.

9. A system as recited in claim 8 wherein said metering monitor is used to identify the software application in use by said client computer.

10. A system as recited in claim 7 wherein said metering monitor generates and communicates to the billing site a user map that identifying every user currently running a client application on said client computer.

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11. A system as recited in claim 10 wherein said metering monitor also generates a job map that maps the local identity of a running client application to a single number allocated by said billing site and to the user to which the running client application belongs.

5   12. A system as recited in claim 7 wherein all user information communicated between said metering monitor and said billing site is encrypted.

13. A system as recited in claim 7 wherein said metering monitor keeps track in a pending feature table, all features being used by said client applications.

14. A system as recited in claim 13 wherein said pending feature table is stored on a persistent storage means for recovery in the event of a system failure.

15. A system as recited in claim 7 wherein a timing means is used to cause said metering monitor to perform periodic connection checks to determine whether or not any running client applications have unexpectedly terminated without reporting their status.

16. An application package for installation on a client computer, comprising:
a metering monitor,
20   a login tool,
one or more client applications, and
an application library having metering means for developing information relating to usage of said client applications;
wherein said login tool is used to establish communication with a user account at a
25   billing site, said metering means is used to obtain and communicate to said metering monitor usage information relating to usage of said client applications, and said metering monitor is used to communicate said usage information to said user account at said billing site.

17. A system as recited in claim 16 wherein said metering monitor is also used to
30   identify the software application in use by said client computer.

18. An application package as recited in claim 16 further comprising a configuration file for storing configuration parameters that enable correct operation of a system using the application package.

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19. An application package as recited in claim 18 wherein on login said metering monitor grants or withholds authorization to run said client application based upon the state of the user's account.

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20. An application package for installation on a client computer, comprising:

a login tool,

one or more client applications, and

an application library having metering means for developing information relating to usage of said client applications and a metering monitor;

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wherein said login tool is used to establish communication with a user account at a billing site, said metering means is used to obtain and communicate to said metering monitor usage information relating to usage of said client applications, and said metering monitor is used to communicate said usage information to said user account at said billing site.